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Theory of Gen Inertia

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the theory of Gen inertia. The research defines and differentiates the concept of Gen inertia from organizational knowledge inertia and identifies factors that act as impediments to effective workforce learning. Using functional model, this paper helps to model several scenarios that enables to study and analyse the causes that are responsible for inducing learning inertia in organizational settings. The research furthermore highlights the problems faced by those employees who aims for vertical mobility but faces several constraints at their workplace. Constraints or impediments create organizational barriers to learning that precludes underrepresented employees from achieving the full benefits of learning and therefore, interferes with their learning processes on which they endure. The present paper addresses these issues and advocates several solutions to identify constraints and barriers to effective learning under organizational cluster settings.

Keywords: Gen inertia, organizational learning, knowledge inertia

JEL Classification code: D21, D23

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1. Introduction

“Though fearful and worried of uncertainty, an employee silently performs her duty, of being apprehensive not to lose her livelihood, in one of the remote corners of her workplace, seemly disguise of her apprehensions, accepting all the deformities that the organization presents her. She is a patient labour out of felicitous novelty, and bounded by the common terms of life and routine duties, could afford little but the elegance of dignity. Yet, she is a vigorous mind with a delicacy of taste for ambition,

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but deprived of the luxury to avail the opportunities that (organizational) learning and knowledge could facilitate—vertical mobility. She is trapped by Gen inertia!”

— Chatterjee

This research underpins the theoretical concept of Gen inertia in the context of organizational learning and knowledge management perspective. By borrowing the concept of ‘inertia’ from the physics of mechanics, the present research endeavours to understand how this law of motion can be applied to learning. The present paper is concerned with the problems in organizational learning that leads to a different kind of inertia—knowledge inertia, in learning organizations (Liao 2002). The concept of Gen inertia (Chatterjee 2015, *in press*) has been introduced in relation to the context of organizational *knowledge inertia* (Liao 2002; Wang & Yang 2013). Although the term “Gen inertia” resembles the concept of “knowledge inertia” in certain aspects, the former phrase differs from the latter in functional aspect. Inertia, nonetheless, is a concept in physics which denotes resistance to an object which tends to change in a state of motion. Simply put, inertia refers to any obstruction or impediment which hinders motion of a moving object (Voigt 1901, Liao 2002). Learning is a dynamic process. Organizational learning thus can be assumed to be a dynamic process as well, since scholars have attempted to understand interorganizational learning as a dynamic process (Mozzato and Bitencourt 2014). Learning follows a definite trajectory; i.e., being a dynamic variable, knowledge being constantly added and/or updated about the evolving processes and practices and therefore, learning factor requires cognition. So any impediment large enough to hinder learning leads to “inertia” in the knowledge trajectory. The research question of importance in this paper is as follows: (1) what is Gen inertia, and (2) what causes it? A theoretical foundation is provided to explain what Gen inertia is, and how it relates to organizational knowledge inertia. Gen inertia may be considered as a form of *structural inertia*—the very concept of *structural inertia* related to organizational culture first proposed by Hannan & Freeman (1984). The goal of this paper, therefore, is to develop

a model that identifies the factors that act as barriers affecting learning in organizations, and elucidate how such factors act as constraints in organizational learning (Chatterjee 2013) which eventually results in organizational Gen inertia. Gen inertia therefore has been characterized in this paper into two categories; i.e., the first one related to organizational learning framework, while the second one associated with learning employees in an organization.

2. Theory of Gen Inertia:

The term ‘Knowledge inertia’ was first used distinctively by Liao (2002) to differentiate it from other forms of executive “inertia”— for instance, outsourcing inertia (Mol & Kotabe 2011), consumer inertia (Han. H. & Y. Kim & E. Kim, 2011), organizational inertia (Dawn Kelly & Terry L. Amburgey, 1991; James W. Dean, Jr & Scott A. Snell, 1991). Knowledge inertia described by Wang & Yang (2013) in such context connotes to behavioural perspective which relates to problems in knowledge management. This problem, according to the authors, concerns with the *process* of learning and knowledge *sharing* that hinders employees to think creatively. This particular aspect of the problem of knowledge management has however, been implicitly defined by other scholars in analogous contexts that closely resembles the current concept without explicit proposition of the term “knowledge inertia”, until Liao (2002). The proposal of an analogous concept—Gen inertia (Chatterjee, 2015), therefore, attempts to differentiate functionally the latter concept from the preceding concept of knowledge inertia in one major aspect. Whereas Liao (2002) and Wang & Yang (2013) pertains to the problems in the “utilization” of knowledge, we characterize it as a concept that pertains to the problems in the “acquisition” of knowledge, and therefore, various aspects of learning that presents as obstacles or constraints to acquisition of knowledge by workforces in an organization. This is important with respect to the effect of considering this notion practical, that if, if any knowledge is to be used to solve a problem, it must be generated or

acquired; and, coupled with the problem of managing knowledge within organizations, this research attempts to model an inclusive framework to understand how knowledge is acquired, how it is used to solve problems, and what are the obstacles to effective workforce learning that hinder employee performance. There is an explicit, positive correlation between learning in organizations and employee performance. Also, Liao *et al* (2008) points out to the association between knowledge inertia, organizational learning and organization innovation. This relationship is particularly imperative since it relates organizational learning to innovation as innovation is one of the key variables of market competition between firms. Nevertheless, it is generally lauded that learning imparts knowledge about organizational practice and processes. Both the employees and their organizations need to learn and adapt to uncertain, changing environments to keep up with the speed of technical advancements (Hannan & Freeman 1984). Knowledge and information plays a key role in this respect. Knowledge—now used both as a power and a resource, has become a significant asset for organizations and individuals (AKÜZÜM, 2004). It has been established that knowledge and competence are regarded as one of the most critical resources of a modern economy or a firm (Lam 1998). Knowledge is considered as a resource and requirements of production (Grant 1996) whereas a modern corporation is considered as an organizational unit for integrating knowledge and managing such knowledge. Whereas Gould (2009) provide a framework for understanding organizations as learning system, Roper & Pettit (2002) emphasized that it is hard to find an organization that does not acknowledge the importance of knowledge generation and OL. We may thus definitely assume that knowledge is an important factor of production and learning enables acquisition of information and turning it into useful knowledge. Indeed, obstacles to organizational learning hamper acquisition of knowledge, and therefore, could affect organizational performance. Very few researches have actually highlighted this particular issue of barriers to knowledge acquisition in

organizations. In fact Riege (2005) has enumerated about the knowledge-sharing barriers by providing a framework about how to identify potential bottlenecks that acts as barriers toward knowledge sharing. Prior to Andreas Riege, De Long and Fahey (2000) introduced the concept of diagnosing cultural barriers to effective knowledge management. David De Long and Fahey (2000) identified different ways by which culture influences knowledge sharing, and they have mentioned about specific interventions to align an organization's culture or environment to support effective knowledge use. At the same time, Damodaran and Olphert (2000), besides others, have also analyzed the barriers and facilitators of knowledge management. However, it seems equally relevant to acknowledge the fact at the earliest— the importance of managing the working knowledge that organizations have (Davenport & Prusak 1998). What is working knowledge and how do organizations manage and improve the knowledge that organizations have? We consider all these prior works as important foundations to our study to identify and understand the barriers and obstacles to effective knowledge management (KM) in learning organizations. As this paper concentrates deeply on the issue of organizational and workforce knowledge acquisition, it has now become essential to understand what prevents acquisition of knowledge in organizations. Of course obstacles may thwart the progress of the learning trajectory and could lead to inertia in knowledge acquisition. However, it is also essential to delineate the *differences* between the barriers and obstacles to *KM*, and barriers and obstacles to *learning* in organizations. In essence, both these confounding issues may lead to knowledge (or Gen) inertia in organizations. In fact, Kafchechi, Zamani, and Ebrahimabadi (2012) in their study explained the model of factors that influence on knowledge inertia in an organizational context. Therefore, effective management of resources, its allocation for learning, and the practice of efficient knowledge management is essential to oversee sustainable workforce learning and prevent any knowledge inertia in an organizational context. Barriers to learning in organizations may

distinctively be categorized as; for example, due to unavailability or under-allocation of resources, lack of motivation, deficiency of trainers, poor human resource management (HRM) culture, depressive organizational milieu and work environment, incompetent trainers, asymmetric knowledge distribution, inefficient organization-wide knowledge sharing, and other heterogeneous factors. This proves the notion how knowledge has become so formidable a resource! Indeed it is difficult to define exactly what knowledge is—since knowledge is neither data nor information, but related to both (Davenport & Prusak 1998), so one must acquire data and information to generate knowledge. And this explains why is it essential to acquire, manage and share this formidable resource more efficiently. This paper therefore, deals with the *problem of acquisition* and sharing of data or information—“Gen”, we may call it.

3. Definition of Gen Inertia

Gen inertia is a kind of inertia that supposedly results from constraints to and impediment in employee (workforce) learning while at work; therefore, it deals with obstacles to workforce learning. However, constraints and obstacles to effective learning are not just restricted to employees learning at their workplaces— this phenomenon is universal. In this paper, we restrict our study to learning employees at business organizations. Consequently, there are methods to remove those obstacles to enable learning and facilitate workforce adaptation. The more efficiently employees adapts to an organizational environment, better they perform their duties. But there are barriers, obstacles and constraints that employees often face as a result of poor HR policies and practices, and some of these are disregarded which hinders their learning, and therefore, affects their performance. This is the central theme of this paper: accordingly, we try to address three critical issues; (1) Definition—what is Gen inertia, (2) what accounts for knowledge (Gen) inertia in organizations, and (3) how to deal with it. Besides, this paper also attempts to address how constructive instructional design and goal-

oriented learning in business organizations helps employees to perform their duties better. The effect of motivation on employee learning is revisited. The paper calls for the need of special attention to critical issues concerning underperforming employees who supposedly lags behind the learning curve, and in performance, due to those factors, that are implicitly related to their skills, learning, education, and orientation. In order to understand the concept of Gen inertia as an aspect of organizational knowledge inertia, it is essential to study and analyze what organizational learning is, as well as to understand what inertia means in these contexts and so why it is so important. Furthermore, it is necessary to assume several idiosyncratic features of workforce learning in workplaces. Management scholars lays much stress on the argument, that organizations struggle hard to maintain competitive advantage in complex, challenging environments. To keep up and sustain the competitive advantage, now, it is obvious, that organizations rely on the power and utility of knowledge to guide them through cut-throat competition. Innovation plays a critical role to keep up with the competition. According to Peter Drucker, innovation is the work of knowing rather than doing. So competitions based on innovation drive rely exclusively on the knowledge domain.

3.1 Importance of Knowledge in Decision Making:

Every strategic organizational decision must occasion close evaluation and assessment before being implemented. The evaluation and assessment of decisions in organization is a knowledge work. Besides, to maintain competitive advantage, organizations need to innovate constantly and innovation is a process-oriented action that requires understanding as well as knowledge about products, processes, people, and the economy (Drucker & Noel 1986). Innovation which results from R&D activities stipulates knowledge workers with cutting-edge information. Innovation generates as well as requires new knowledge (new Gen). The capacity to generate new information (new gen) depends on the

cognitive capabilities of the knowledge workers. Therefore, this very same idea of linking OL to organizational innovation shall appear valid enough. Once again, there is a large number of research works dedicated to organizational learning which, from the frequency of which they are cited or referred, and from their being so extensively analyzed, forms the core matter of interest to OL scholars expressing different viewpoints and opinions on this subject. In this research, we touch upon some of the important works that seems relevant to our research question in question, that constitutes the background of this research.

4. Research Backdrop

We have considered a number of postulations based on which we build a hypothesis to model several scenarios aimed at defining the learning environment in knowledge organizations, as well as the *constraining factors* that likely hinder organizational learning (henceforth OL). The idea about identifying the constraining factors supposedly hindering learning in organizations is derived from Goldratt's (1984) seminal work "The Theory of Constraints". Based on this theoretical concept of constraint, Chatterjee (2013, 2014) provides an essential framework to identify and eliminate bottlenecks, focus and leverage, and manage knowledge in organizational context. Goldratt's theory in this context is equally relevant to propose the theoretical concept of Gen inertia in relation to knowledge inertia in learning organizations. The role of constraining factors and barriers in this respect is to arrest the process of learning. If we assume "learning" as an action which results in acquisition of knowledge, that knowledge thereafter becomes the "body of information". Thus knowledge can be viewed as a *content of learning* which can be static (inert) or dynamic (changeable). Knowledge is accumulated through learning and information processing. The concept of *inertia* which we borrow from the physical law of inertia from theoretical mechanics is a hypothetical concept; i.e., inertia is a tendency of objects to remain stationary or uniform motion (Wang & Yang 2013). However, it is

impossible to prove it experimentally. That is to say, as Coelho (2014) points out in his paper—it has been an impossible task to verify the law of inertia experimentally, as most scholars of physics have acknowledged this fact (See a historical review of the Law of Inertia, Ricardo L. Coelho 2014). The reason being that—as Voigt (1901) pointed out about the law of inertia:

“It is hypothetical, because one cannot completely manage to liberate a body from all action”.

By bypassing a similar debate about the ontology of knowledge from a philosophical view point of whether if knowledge exists in a free form or if it is impossible to conceive it being decoupled from cognition (mind), we move ahead by assuming that knowledge is simply a concept (entity or body of information). This assumption would free us from the redundant debate on the nature of existence of knowledge. Since we assume knowledge is a body of information, it can be highly variable (dynamic) or static (stagnant). Note that in the literature on ‘knowledge inertia’, several authors (Reger & Palmer 1996; Liao *et al* 2008; Kafchechi *et al* 2012) have highlighted the aspect of the problem of employing ‘stagnant knowledge’ or old knowledge to deal with new emerging problems. This is described as a tendency to remain with the status quo (Liao *et al* 2008; Kafchechi *et al* 2012), that this is the propensity of using only past experience, dormant knowledge, and stagnant resources to deal with new organizational problems which causes inertia in organization (Kafchechi *et al* 2012). This organizational inertia results from quiescent learning that leads to knowledge inertia. This particular tendency seems to reflect an analogous concept called cognitive inertia. We search for the reasons behind such tendencies.

It shall be born in mind that the factors that hinders workforce learning results in knowledge inertia that may implicitly affect employee performance. To make learning effective in knowledge organizations, employees should be periodically evaluated on their knowledge skills. This is not, however, to consider this conception of employee education, as

being ‘the only’ avenue of workforce empowerment. For, there are other avenues of employee empowerment which merits equal attention. Nevertheless, we concentrate our study on the central theme of this paper—why employees fall behind in their learning curve and, what factors, in essence, contributes as ‘obstacles’ to effective learning in organizations? The attempt to diagnose the causative factors that contributes as constraints/obstacles also provides one with the understanding of how to find effective solutions to remove such barriers to learning. It is therefore, essential to comprehend what motivates and stimulates employees to learn and engage in knowledge activities in organizations. Motivation stimulates learning, and contributes to the learning process (Hall, 1966). Consequently, deficiencies in motivating factors can lead to inertia in learning. In fact, there could be a multitude of factors that may contribute to the problem of Gen inertia which require close examination of the inherent problems in order to deal with this issue effectively. This includes dealing with factors that hinders development of cognitive capabilities. In the next section, we develop a model to study the theoretical aspects of knowledge inertia in organizational context.

5. Model and Methodology

The goal of this research revolves around the problem of addressing constraints to learning in organizations that leads to organizational knowledge inertia. The concept of *knowledge inertia* has been adapted to explain the problem of Gen inertia in a new framework; for example, to reflect the environment that leads to stagnant growth in organizational information generation, the effect being knowledge inertia— that may result from bottlenecks in organizational learning which apparently hinders empowerment of the workforce. It shall be born in mind that the factors which affect organizational learning also affect organizational knowledge growth. Explanation sought therefore, in this study, is about the dynamics of learning in organization and the role of constraining factors using several parameters and heterogeneous variables— assuming

these variables to have individual effects on organizational (employee) knowledge growth. The analysis is concentrated upon learning outcomes. The central conceptualizations of learning outcomes can be derived from Christophel (1990):

“...a process involving the acquisition or modification of cognitive, affective, and/or behavioural outcomes (Bloom 1956, 1976)”.

Therefore, our attempt is to delineate several learning outcomes as trajectories within a frame of reference to address the problem of Gen inertia. Our definitions include several assumptions based on which our model is build, and we attempt to prove the hypothesis using functional model of inferences which incorporates several parameters of learning in organization, and several other variables, that we assume to have effect on knowledge generation and workforce learning. The parameters and variables are defined as follows:

Let $\varepsilon^{-1/\lambda}$ be defined as a constraining factor on employee education wherein $-1/\lambda$ corresponds to any real number that explains the degree of constriction on ε . Let $\eta^{-1/\sigma}$ be defined as the extent of obstruction measured in terms of $-1/\sigma$ wherein ‘ σ ’ denotes the limiting factor. Operator ρ and v subsequently corresponds to endogenous and exogenous factors respectively, that includes structural factor and lack of motivation as variables. X corresponds to an unknown factor which affects the degree of inertia in learning. Using these variables, we define several functional equations that model the scenario of inertia in learning which are as follows:

$$\varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{\lambda}} + \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{-\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v} \right) \quad (1)$$

Equation 1 defines the model in simplest sense that includes the variables assigned as above. Equation 2 incorporates the unknown factor ‘ x ’ as:

$$\frac{1}{x} - (\rho - v) \quad (2)$$

We now combine equations 1 and 2 to derive the functional model which explains the effects of constraining factors on employee learning and education:

$$\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{\lambda}} + \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v}\right) / \eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}} \left(\frac{1}{x} - (\rho - v)\right) \quad (3)$$

Simplifying, we get:

$$\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{\lambda}} + \eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}} \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v}\right) \times \left(\frac{1}{x} - \rho - v\right)$$

Now, by integrating on 'x'—

$$\int \left(\varepsilon^{\frac{1}{\lambda}} + \eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}} \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v}\right) \times \left(\frac{1}{x} - \rho - v\right) \right) dx \quad (4)$$

We derive:

$$x \cdot \varepsilon^{\frac{1}{\lambda}} + \eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}} \text{Log}(x) \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v}\right) + x \cdot \eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}} \left(1 - \frac{\eta^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}}{\rho - v}\right) \cdot (-\rho - v) \quad (5)$$

Hypothesis: *Under a given organizational environment, it is the effect of not the number, but the quality of trainer that affect outcomes of learning to the greatest extent, and it is not just the constraining factors, but an undefined factor that modulates the constraints, which moderates the momentum of learning to a large extent.*

It is nevertheless easy to assess what employees learn at their workplace by using metrics of assessment to evaluate their learning experiences, and therefore, establish their learning curve or trajectories. A better option is to employ independent professional assessment bodies to periodically evaluate employees who are keenly interested in further learning to move up the organizational ladder. This is much easier for the middle management and the top management to accomplish, but often becomes difficult for the blue collar workers who supposedly derive little incentives from continuous learning. There must be enough support for employees to

continue learning that invariably contributes to an employee's evolving skill sets. Workforces also gain knowledge from learning-by-doing and it is important to study how they essentially apply that knowledge in their routine works. Based on several heterogeneous variables that include (unavailability or under) allocation of resources (δ), motivation factor (μ), number of trainers (τ), poor human resource management (HRM) culture (ϑ), (depressive) organizational milieu and work environment (υ), and incompetent trainers (ς), we model an organizational learning scenario that simulates learning in organization to test our hypothesis. We denote total amount of resource at time t as δ_{t+1} , where δ_{t+1} is the amount of resource allocated for training and/or learning at time ' t '

$$\frac{1}{(1-\delta_{t+1})} \quad (6)$$

Let us assume an organizational learning culture defined as—

$$\left(\frac{\tau_{\eta}}{(\varsigma)} + \frac{\upsilon}{(\vartheta)} \right) \quad (7)$$

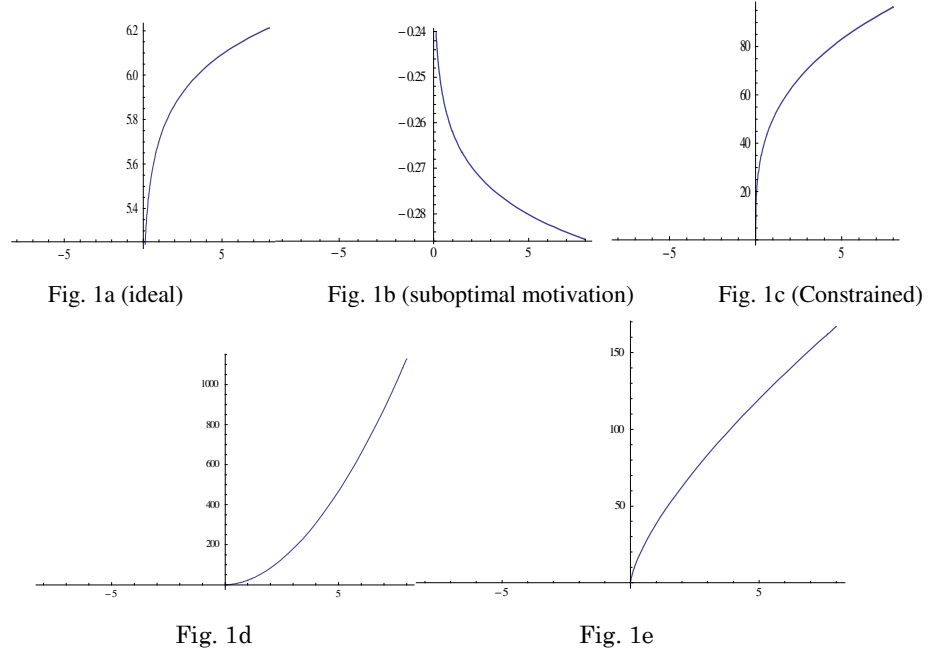
Now, let us define learning ' ℓ ' as continuous, dynamic dependent variable as $\Delta\ell_{\kappa}$ wherein ' κ ' being the operator denotes the knowledge factor, and Δ denotes a change in knowledge base following learning. The overall equation can be modelled using all of the above given independent variables as:

$$\Delta\ell_{\kappa} = \left(\frac{1}{(1-\delta_{t+1})} + \left(1 - \frac{\tau^{\frac{1}{n+1}}}{\varsigma^{n-1}} \right) + \left(\frac{\upsilon}{\vartheta} \right) \right) / \left(\frac{1}{\mu} \right) \quad (8)$$

Let us add an exogenous unknown constraining factor ' x^{φ} ' to the equation that would likely affect the learning outcome;

$$\Delta\ell_{\kappa} = x^{\varphi^{-1/z}} \left(\frac{1}{(1-\delta_{t+1})} + \left(1 - \frac{\tau^{\frac{1}{n+1}}}{\varsigma^{n-1}} \right) + \left(\frac{\upsilon}{\vartheta} \right) \right) / \left(\frac{1}{\mu} \right) \quad (9)$$

We define the following scenario following plotting of equation (9) to derive several learning outcomes as;



The learning outcomes are depicted in the above figures Fig. 1a through Fig. 1e under different moderating scenarios that takes into account several factors which are assumed to have an effect on organizational learning. The constraining factors have been modelled in order to include the impact of constraints on the learning trajectory, and therefore, on learning outcomes. Our consideration of work environment and stress as important factor of employee performance and productivity is supported by previous researches on relevant topics. We also observe an unusual response of constraining factors on learning outcome; while it is an established fact that constraints affect learning, increasing the effect of the parameter value of constraint alone may induce (un)productive learning, whereas the unknown factor χ impinging on the constraint, its effect is multiplied and learning gets severely affected. That is, such an effect has a profound interceding negative impact on learning outcomes. We define this novel χ factor as—*interceding* factor, which means that this χ factor moderates the constraint factor by intervening on behalf of other exogenous factor(s) that have negative effects on employee learning.

6. Results

We report the results from the theoretical model designed to study the effects of various independent variables that affect learning and induce Gen inertia. One of the most important finding is that, we have been able to elucidate and identify several factors which affect learning outcomes in organizations. An interceding factor χ is identified which apparently has the greatest impact on learning outcomes. The mechanism underlying this theory relates to constraints binding on the learning curve, and the “interceding factor” that moderates the constraining factor negatively impedes learning, and therefore, induces Gen inertia. Another important finding is— that the effect of motivation seems to be significant in determining the overall outcome of learning. Furthermore, with regard to the hypothesis proposed, we have been able to show following equation (9) that the quality of trainers/educators has a significant effect on learning outcomes, irrespective of the quantity of trainers and the motivating factors.

7. Discussion

Constraints or impediments generate barriers to effective learning in organizations, and therefore, interferes with the innovation process on which a knowledge organization thrives. Business organizations, service industries, and manufacturing units— all thrive on knowledge and innovation drive; e.g., they survive and flourish on their technical competencies, expertises, capabilities, and skills. They survive and compete on human resources. All of the above given edifices are not only born out of learning, but organizational learning furthermore strengthens the knowledgebase and foundations of every organization. Learning organizations are meant to support and promote learning, enable knowledge-sharing, and help empower their employees with up-to-date information about their job related tasks in order to enable them to face new challenges that a complex organizational milieu presents with. It is because not all the employees possess equal knowledge and skills, but under pressure, they are expected to perform with efficiency. It is essential

to bear in mind, that organizational learning is not only about educating its own workforce and adding more information to its knowledge base, but it is more about empowering the workforce with useful, practical knowledge that they can apply at work. It is indeed much relevant to state that most employees in an organization dream about Vertical mobility, yet a very few of them actually accomplish it. Many of these employees are so much so occupied with their routine jobs, they seldom think about changing their status quo; i.e., they are worried about losing their present job risking for fancier uncertainty. Some of the employees believe that they have the ability to move ahead, yet they find their ambitions shelved in obscurity. Some of them are oblivious about the advantages of continuous education and learning while at work. So they accept the status quo as a hard reality. This is mostly seen amongst blue collar or white collar employees in most business organizations and may be one of the reasons of unfairness and gender inequality in corporate organizational culture. Since many of the underrepresented employees end up being virtually trapped in Gen inertia, this research calls for the need to maintain uniformity in OL and clarity in knowledge sharing among the workforces. So far from this, there can be no question about the fact, that knowledge is an essential factor of individual and organizational productivity as it benefits both the organization and its workforces. However, it is often observed that learning is not uniform in many organizations— it is sometimes instinctively heterogeneous: i.e., although some employees benefit from learning, some others fail to take advantage of it. Moreover, a number of them are left out of this learning–information–knowledge paradigm (LKI paradigm) which results in cognitive inertia in these employees. Or, even if there are opportunities to learn and absorb knowledge, many employees lag behind in their learning curve. The reasons for this may be varied; e.g., faulty instructional design, lack of proper mentorship, dearth of competent and motivated trainers, lack of motivation, or emergent constraints to advanced learning. Experience dictates that there are many employees

who are eager to learn while at work, but they are often “ignored” because they belong to the Ground-level (blue collar employees) within the organization. Most employees have the right and liberty as well as expectations to go up the organizational ladder; they dream for vertical mobility; they presume better appraisal about their occupations, and anticipate better recompenses for their work. Besides, they not only need guidance, but they need new knowledge as well. Employees require to be taught about the industry and market changes, process needs, and innovation needs. It is rather intimidating to observe that although most organizations have advanced appraisal systems for their employees, many of these organizations lacks strong and formidable in-house training and learning units to educate their incumbents. To be noted, business organizations function for profit and survival; they are excellent in exploiting opportunities and known for their entrepreneurship endeavours aimed to provide goods and services which ought to be comparatively better in quality than what most public goods and service providers provide. So they are not categorically in the business of undertaking workforce education, which however, do not preclude them from educating their workforce. In fact, in-house training and workplace education has become so important that firms today dedicate a substantial amount of resources towards human resource development (HRD), high-dependency training, and employee education (See for instance, Human Resource Development Objectives by Reid Bates, 2002). The purpose of human resource development, according to Bates (2002 vide UNESCO—EOLSS):

“...is defined as a capacity to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work-related systems and contribute to sustainable human development.”

— (Source: Bates 2002)

This is important since in this age of information and technology, businesses thrive on competition, and to be competitive, they must be innovative. Innovation is the work of *knowing*, rather than *doing*

(Drucker)². Continuous Innovation mandates substantial research and development (R&D) activities which require a well competent educated workforce. Workforce can become competent and expert by means of education, learning, and practice. Learning thus requires competent trainers, expert mentors, tools and resources. It is not just learning which imparts knowledge; observation, perception and conceptualization of the situation and processes in practice are essential components of understanding what has been taught. Organizations must allocate time and resources to create such “additional space” for the learning employees which in Japanese philosophy is known as “ba”— or “space”, as it has been conceptualized by Nonaka & Konno (1998). However, given all the above endogenous factors, still often it has been observed that some of the employees fail to appreciate the essence of organizational learning; they fail to take advantage of the opportunities to learn and grow within their organizations. Some form of binding constraints holds them back from exploiting fully the opportunities being provided by the learning organization. Obstacles may depress their learning curve while they may face some other exogenous or endogenous limitations which results in cognitive stagnation or “Gen inertia”. They become confined within certain boundaries of activities and routines of organizational culture. Some employees fail to adapt to the new changes within the organization. Impediments to workforce learning may cause “Gen inertia” which may result in productivity loss and inefficiency. The theme of this research therefore, revolves around construction of a theoretical model of constraint, and to understand the factors that contributes to obstacles to workforce learning. To address the issue of Gen (knowledge) inertia related to workforce education, this paper provides a theoretical background in order to unfold and study the nature of constraints (NoC) to learning while at work; whilst at the same time, it offers solutions for mediating organization-wide effective employee

² The Discipline of Innovation, by Peter F. Drucker; Harvard Business Review, 1984, revised version in 2002.

education that aims to benefit both the workforce and the organization at large.

8. Conclusion

The present research introduces the concept of the Theory of Gen Inertia in organizational learning paradigm. It outlines a formal definition and description of what the term “Gen inertia” means, and differentiates it from other types of organizational inertia, and in particular— knowledge inertia. Using functional models, the research attempts to search for tendencies that induce inertia in learning amongst the employees. Using the Theory of Constraint as well as the concept of knowledge inertia at the backdrop, this research explains why there occurs resistance to learning and what holds back the learning momentum (*Gen momentum*) in organizations. Since workforce learning is a dynamic aspect of organizational culture, it enables employees to learn and apply knowledge effectively in practice.

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